

Luis J. Rodriguez

PO Box 328, San Fernando CA 91341

Phone: 818-898-0013 * Fax: 818-367-5600

Email: SevenRabbit54@gmail.com * Website: www.luisjrodriguez.com

July 9, 2013

The Honorable Tony Cardenas
1508 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Cardenas:

This letter is in support of your legislation entitled the Community-Based Gang Intervention Act. I believe this bill offers innovative and evidence-based alternatives to addressing gangs, street violence and crime outside of suppression models. Law enforcement is key to any reduction in violence and crime. But these should be part of a whole community package, a community-based approach that utilizes multi-prong ways to address family dynamics, personal traumas, lack of resources, drug treatment, mental health issues, and a floundering and wholly insufficient jobs market. Poverty and the shrinking middle class contribute to the illicit end of an economy. The roots of these have to be dealt with as we all work together to bring lasting peace and safety to our embattled communities.

Your bill does more to address this violence than most any other legislation we have seen in our legislative bodies. Essentially we cannot just arrest OR punish our way out of the devastating gang violence impacting our urban and rural communities. In forty years such violence has reached epidemic levels with more than a million gang members in all fifty states, entrenched in a growing drug trade, and spreading to other countries in the hemisphere and elsewhere. We are now the largest jailer in the planet – 25 percent of the world's prisoners are in the United States while we are only 5 percent of the world's population. And all this has continued despite billions of dollars in drug wars, in prison construction, in gang injunctions, in gang enhancements, and similar policies.

We've done what hasn't worked – now let's do something that does work (these practices have been proven) and in the long run will only cost a fraction of our current tax obligation. Again, we need police. But we need so much more.

For your information, I've spent forty years working in urban peace efforts as well as gang prevention and intervention in Los Angeles (in the early 1970s, working on peace truces in East L.A.; through late 1970s and early 1980s gatherings of the End Barrio Coalition in California and other organizations) and in Chicago during the period of the worse violence from 1985 till 2000. For 33 years I've spoken in prisons, juvenile lockups, Native American reservations, schools, universities, conferences, libraries and

more across the U.S. I've been involved in truces/talks between Bloods and Crips in L.A.; Latino gangs like Latin Kings and Two-Six Nation in Chicago; Mara Salvatrucha 13 and 18th Street in L.A., El Salvador and Guatemala; peace efforts in northern Mexico during the worse of the drug war violence in 2010; as well as in Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, and England. I've written extensively on this for the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Nation*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Grand Street*, *L.A. Weekly*, *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Fox News Latino*, and the *Huffington Post*, among others.

And I have several books addressing these issues including my bestselling memoir "Always Running, La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A." and its sequel "It Calls You Back: An Odyssey Through Love, Addiction, Revolutions, and Healing" (both from Touchstone Books/Simon & Schuster). Also an illustrated bilingual children's book "It Doesn't Have to Be This Way: A Barrio Story" (Lee & Low Books). My 2001 book summarizing this work, "Heart & Hands: Creating Community in Violent Times," will be reprinted in 2014 by Seven Stories Press in New York City.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Luis J. Rodriguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Luis" and last name "Rodriguez" being more prominent than the middle initial "J".

Luis J. Rodriguez